DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 037 415 SP 003 710

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TITLE School-Community Relations.
PUB DATE [70]
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Minneapolis, March 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.10
DESCRIPTORS *Community Control, Educational Finance, Instructional Programs, *Policy Formation, School Administration, *School Community Relationship, *School Policy, *Teacher Participation

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to observe the potential conflict over control of education in order to hypothesize about the generality of system-community conflict phenomena. A questionnaire was administered to a randomly stratified sample of the community and to the total professional teaching population in a city school district (population 35,000) in upstate New York. Respondents were asked who they presently perceived had the decisionmaking power and who they thought should have final control over a series of economic, administrative, and educational issues. Conclusions: There is a potential for sharp conflict between environmental community groups and the internal professional staff concerning the ideal distribution of authority, the largest differences concerning economic issues. The community desires greater control for itself and its elected representative, the school board, and less by the professional teacher than is desired by teachers. On both educational and economic matters both community and teachers desire some change from what they perceive is present practice. Both desire more control by teachers of the educational process. Community perceptions do not accurately reflect current decisionmaking practices. Such current ignorance while serving to avoid overt conflict also sows the seed for future conflict. Collective bargaining, for instance, may increase the potential for conflict by increasing the visibility of internal operations, by making more salient the relative power of teacher groups, etc. (JS)

ED037415

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School--Community Relations

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SP003710

INTRODUCTION

The events in public education in recent years have highlighted what is destined to become a new phase in the long and protracted struggle for control of education in the United States. Salz summarized the present situation best when he states,[1]

> The professionalization of teachers and local lay control of education are on a collision course. No matter how optimistic we are about cooperation between the community and its teachers, many issues will arise which will pit the desires of the professional teacher against the wishes of the community.

Other writers (Stinnet,[2] Ohm,[3] and Moscow[4]) maintain that the focal point of these future confrontations will be over the locus of control in decision-making processes of the school system; will control reside with teachers or the local community?

Traditional studies in public education do not provide an established framework in which this potential teacher-community problem can be understood and analyzed. In fact, the largest proportion of the literature is Weberian in nature, treating the school as a closed system with clearly defined rules governing the behavior of employees and perpetuating efficiency in the operation of schools as organizations. Newman and Oliver attribute this to the fact that the factory system served as an initial guideline in the development of educational institutions with the result that:[5]

> The schools came to be administered like smooth-running production lines. Clear hierarchies of authority were established: student, parent, principal, superintendent, and school committeeman, each of whom has perceived to know his function and the limits of his authority.

Recent developments, however, have dramatically underlined the insufficiency of this closed system approach. School districts have

been increasingly confronted with the necessity of securing resources from an ever widening number of groups and institutions which exist beyond organizational boundaries. Goal modification and other system adaptations have often been the price for securing these resources.[6] Yet, little empirical research exists which analyzes the difficulties posed for educational systems by these competing demands and the organizational adaptation methods employed to deal with these problems. For example, school systems are confronted with aroused community groups on the one hand and militant teacher groups on the other, each demanding that the system be more responsive to their needs and expectations. Compounding the system's difficulty in resolving the often incompatible demands of these two groups are the constraints imposed by other relevant environmental groups. For instance, in New York State, as in many others, the state legislature has imposed the processes and structures of collective negotiations on school districts, thereby providing an additional constraint affecting system behavior. Thus, schools are confronted with the difficulties of resolving demands from external community groups and internal system members such as teachers, while also conforming to the legislature requirements of collective negotiations. The events in New York City (i.e., Oceanhill-Brownsville) during 1968 attest to the systemic dilemmas posed in just such a process and the inadequacy of current analytical approaches for understanding such problems.

Although it is illegal for public employees to strike in the State of New York, on September 9, 1968, the United Federation of Teachers in New York City implemented their fourth strike (1960, 1961, 1967, and

1968) in eight years. This became one of the longest strikes in the history of education, lasting some 2 1/2 months. Evidence indicates that local community control of educational decisions were central issues precipitating the strike.[7] Opponents of decentralization argued that local community control would mean the end of quality education, while Albert Shanker, president of the teacher's union, asserted that "teachers are no longer willing to be supervised by people who have less professional competence than they do."[8]

It is not necessary to reiterate the details of the strike and the resultant settlement to realize that it sounded the death knell of the closed system approach to analyzing relationships between the educational system and the demands of relevant environmental groups such as the community. It was clear from Oceanhill-Brownsville that teachers and community groups often have incompatible expectations, that both groups are willing to withhold resources in an effort to induce system modification and that the process of collective negotiations often inhibits resolution of these system problems. What was not clear, however, was the potential for similar conflicts confronting other school systems. It is all too easy to discuss the New York City experience as atypical. In order to examine the generalizability of this conflict phenomenon, research was undertaken in another community setting in upstate New York. By evaluating the response of both school personnel and community members, it was postulated that if potential conflict over control of education could be found there, then we could hypothesize with somewhat greater certainty about the generality of system-community conflict phenomena.

METHODOLOGY

A guestionnaire was administered to a randomly stratified sample of the community and to the total professional teaching population in one upstate city school district. Broadly stated, a specific subset of decision-making questions was related to three distinct types of educational issues.

> Economic issues - related to decisions requiring monetary expenditures.
> Administrative issues - questions involving the resolution of school problems and facutly hiring.
> Educational issues - any decision that directly pertained to or affected the classroom activities of the teacher.

On each of these issues, participants were asked whom they presently perceived as having final say (i.e., control) and if they had their choice, whom they thought should have final control.

The community was divided according to census tract information. Randomly drawn respondents from each tract were personally interviewed and administered the questionnaire. In total, 425 respondents or over 1% of the community of approximately 35,000 residents were contacted and 321 completely usable responses were secured. Of the 520 member teaching staff in the city school district, 62% responded with completed questionnaires. Comparison of demographic characteristics (e.g., sex, teaching experience, family background) revealed that there were no significant differences between those who responded to the questionnaire and those that chose not to complete their questionnaire. Therefore, the responses received were considered representative of the total teaching population.

FINDINGS

In presenting the data, each issue will be analyzed and discussed in terms of (1) present perceptions, (2) the desires of both the internal system members of the professional teachers staff and the community, and (3) whether or not the issue is a prelude to potential system-community conflict.

Economic Issues

As shown in Table 1, both internal and environmental groups perceived the school board as currently exercising final control over all economic issues. This similarity in views can be attributed to the highly visible nature of current school operations concerning economic decisions. However, the "should be" section reveals that neither the community nor the professional staff is satisfied with the present situation. The community desires increased control over all economic issues. On decisions pertaining to new buildings and facilities, for instance, 79.2% of the community desired final control, while decisions involving faculty salaries and preparation of the budget saw the number of residents wanting final control increase from 8.1% to 33.3% and 11.8% to 43.1% respectively.

Internal system members, unlike the community, believe that internal system functionaries should have final control over economic issues. They would like to see a greater distribution of control to systems members such as the superintendent and other administrators. Of greater importance is the fact that teachers do not want any relevant increase in community control. Therefore, any persistant attempt by the community to increase its voice in economic issues may be accompanied by strong

teaching opposition.

Administrative Issues

The data, shown in Table 2, reveals that there were sharp differences between the perceptions of current control over administrative issues hald by internal system members and those held by the community. While the community perceived the school board as exercising final control, the teachers believed it resided with either the school superintendent or the school administrators. These differences may very well indicate a lack of communications between administrative school district officials and teachers and/or members of the community. The "should be" section reveals that both groups desire the situation to continue as they presently perceive it. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that in the absence of any other activity that would render the discrepant character of these perceptions more visible, there would exist little chance of conflict over administrative issues. However, if either group discovers that its perceptions are erroneous, the situation could lead to conflict as each group attempts to adjust reality to their expectations.

Educational Issues

The data, shown in Table 3, concerning control over educational issues again illustrates the divergent perceptions of internal and external groups. The community, consistent with their views on administrative issues, perceives the school board as having final control over all educational decisions, while the teachers perceive the school administrators as retaining control. Again it appears as though the internal operations of the school may not be apparent to either the community and/or

the professional teaching staff.

Unlike administrative issues, both groups are "dissatisfied" with their present perceptions and wish to see them modified considerably. The community appears uncertain over who should control educational decisions, and vacillates between alternative loci of control (administrators, teachers, school board, and community) depending on the specific educational area. Meanwhile, the normative desires of the professional teaching staff for more control produces a divergence in perceptions. Thus it may be stated that there exists a potential for sharp conflict over who should control educational issues.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Three main themes emerged from these findings. First, there is a potential for sharp conflict between environmental community groups and the internal professional staff concerning the ideal distribution of authority or "how the school should be run." The information presented in Table 4, indicate that on all ten issues there were significant differences between the ideal distribution of authority perceived by the community and that perceived by the professional teachers. Among these, the largest differences concerned economic issues. This sharp divergence in the normative expectations between the members of the community and the professional teaching staff creates a potential for conflict between the two groups.

Secondly, in all instances the community desires greater control for itself and its elected representative, the school board, and less control by the professional teacher than is desired by teachers

themselves. On economic and administrative issues, for instance, teachers believe internal system functionaries, such as the superintendent, should have the final say, while the community feels that they and/or their elected representatives, e.g., the school board, should have the final say. For example, 58.5% of the teachers feel that the superintendent and other internal administrative officials should have final say over preparation of a budget, while only 9.2% of the community feel that these individuals should have final say on these issues. In terms of hiring faculty, 91.8% of the teachers felt that the superintendent and other internal administrative officials should have final say, a view shared by only 47.3% of the community. By the same token, 89.9% of the community felt that either the school board of the community at large should have final say over the preparation of the budget, while only 30.8% of the teachers expressed a similar feeling. In the same manner, 50% of the community felt that either they or the school board should have final say over the hiring of faculty while only 4.2% of the professional teaching staff expressed a similar point of view. Thus on both economic and administrative matters the community desires more of a role for itself and the school board and less of a role for the professional teacher.

On educational matters while, in general, the community desires more school board control than the professional teaching staff desires, the majority of community respondents believe that control over educational issues should rest with the professional educators in the school system. The normative desires of teachers for reduction in administrative control produces the divergence in perceptions and the potential

for conflict. In choosing a textbook, for instance, 38% of the community felt that the teachers should have final say, while 62.4% of the teachers expressed a similar opinion. Similarly, in the formulation of general instructional policy, 15.6% of the community felt that teachers should have final say over these issues, while 38.1% of the teachers felt that they should have control in these matters. Conversely, 34.4% of the community felt that either the school board or the community at large should have final say over matters concerning general instructional policy, while only 12.4% of the teaching staff felt that final control over general instructional policy matters should reside with either of these two groups. In the same vein, 35.9% of the community felt that either the community or the school board should have control over the introduction of new instructional methods, while only 1.6% of the teachers expressed this similar expectation. In short, the widest discrepancy over educational issues concerns the extent to which professional educators should exercise control. A larger percentage of teachers expressed the belief that they should exercise control over educational matters than was expressed by members of the community.

Thirdly, educational and economic matters are likely to be the issues with the highest potentials for conflict, since it is over these issues that both the community and the professional teaching staff desires some change from what they perceive is present practice. On economic matters, the community desires considerably more control over these issues. As an example, in the preparation of the budget, 11.8% of the community believe they have to exert final say, whereas 43.1%

express a preference to exert final control. In the building of new facilities, 45.1% of the community believes that they now have final say, while 79.2% express the desire to have final say. Concerning faculty salaries only 8.1% of the community believes that they have final say while 33.3% of them express a preference for final say control over these requests.

Teachers, on the other hand, express a consistent preference for less community control over these educational and economic issues than they currently perceive. As an example, 53.2% of the teachers now hold that either the general community of the school board exerts final control over the preparation of budget, while only 30.8% of the professional staff desire this condition to continue. Similarly, in the building of new facilities, 56.9% of the teachers currently perceive the community and school board exercising final control, while only 45% desire this practice to continue. Thus, while the community expresses a desire for more control over economic issues, the teachers at the same time expresses a consistent preference for less community involvement and control.

On educational matters the community desires less of a role for itself and the school system administrators and more of a role for the professional teachers. Though the normative expectations and desires of the professional teaching staff move in the same general direction as the expectations of the community, these teacher expectations are sufficiently expansive to produce a significant difference between the orientations of the teachers and the community.

In addition, collective bargaining, which has been mandated by

many state legislatures, may increase the potential for conflict by: (1) increasing the visibility of internal school operations, partially as a byproduct of the publication of various mediation and fact finding reports in the mass media which serves to bring to public view the actual operation of school systems; (2) making more salient the relative power of teacher groups; and (3) increasing the probability that internal system members may realize more of their aspirations, thus widening still further the gap between themselves and the community. As a result of the utilization of the collective bargaining process by teachers in an effort to expand their participation in the school's decision processes, the entire issue of who shall control the school system will become increasingly debated in the public arena. As a result of this debate, more members of the community may come to realize that the school system is not operating in accordance with either their current perceptions or normative expectations. Such an event could move potential conflicts into the realm of actuality.

It is worth noting however, that the discussion to this point has dealt only with the potential for conflict. Thus far we have dealt with conflicting expectations concerning the ideal distribution of authority. While it is reasonably safe to assume that both the professional teaching staff and the community, given the opportunity, will seek to realize their expectations, this potential for conflict is ameliorated by several factors. These are: (a) differing perceptions concerning current decision making practices in educational institutions, and (b) the expectations of environmental groups which seem to be moving in the same direction as those of the professional staff particularly in respect to educational issues.

The data reveals that there are sharp differences between perceptions of the current decision making structure held by internal system members and those held by the community. The community tends to regard the school board and superintendent as exercising considerably more control that is perceived by teachers. As an example, 70.9% of the community believes that the school board exercises final control over the preparation of the budget while only 52.2% of the professional teaching staff expressed a similar perception. Similarly 54.3% of the community perceived that the school board had final control over the hiring of faculty, while only 7.2% of the teaching staff did. 50.0% of the community felt that the school board exercised final control over general instructional policy, a perception shared by only 7.8% of the professional teaching staff. There are wider discrepancies between the teacher-community perceptions of current practice than between the community's current perception and its normative expectations. It is reasonable to assume absent other activity that would render these discrepant perceptions more apparent, that these environmental groups will exert little effort to change current procedure. Since internal operations are not readily visible to non-school system members, the community has developed a distorted perception of how decisions are made, particularly these concerning administrative and educational issues. Interestingly, this very distortion temporarily reduces the probability of overt conflict between the community and the professional teaching staff.

Moreover, the largest discrepancies between the professional teaching staff and the community occured over economic issues such as

the preparation of budgets and the approval of new buildings and facilities. Thus, the relative consensus that educational issues, which lie at the heart of professional concerns, should be left to the professional educators may reduce still further the potential for conflict.

Secondly, it is clear that in the area of educational practice the expectations of both the community and the professional teacher are moving in the same direction: that is, in the direction of increased teacher control over the educational process. In fact, the sharpest differences between current and preferred expectations for the community concerned the increase of teacher control over the educational process. As an example, while 23.5% of the community perceived that teachers currently have final say over the choice of text to be used in their class 48% of the community felt that they should have such final control. Similarly, while only 4.*% of the community felt that teachers had control over the approval of general instructional policy 15.6% of them felt that they should. Thus the fact that the normative expectations in both the community and the professional teacher are moving in a similar direction reduces still further that the potential for conflict.

In short, our data reveals the existence of conflicting trends. On the one hand there is the strong potential for conflict between internal system members and environmental community groups concerning the distribution of authority within the school system (particularly authority over the allocation of economic rewards). On the other hand, however, factors reducing the probability of overt conflict include the low

visibility of current school system operations to the environment and the general feeling that education should be left to the professional educators.

This research also indicates that one of the primary system-environment exchanges of relevance to the study of educational institutions is the transmission and reception of information. At present it appears as though there is little information exchange between schools and community groups. Consequently, the perceptions of segments of a school system's environment do not accurately reflect internal institutional operations, and as information about school system operations increases one can expect additional complaints about the mismatching of beliefs and reality. As a result, while the current ignorance of community groups about school system operations serves to avoid overt conflict it also sows the seed for extensive emotion laden future conflicts. It would appear that school system officials must balance the immediate stability and power gained through the withholding of information against the probability of extensive future conflict. In years to come the "critical expertise" for school administrators may be the ability to shape the expectations of environmental groups through the exchange of information rather than simply the ability to manage internal system operations.

FOOTNOTES

1. A. Salz, "Formula for Inevitable Conflict: Local Control vs. Professionalism", (Phi Delta Kappa, Vol. 50, Feb., 1967) p. 332.

2. T.M. Stinnet, J.H. Kleinman, M.L. Ware, Professional Negotiations in Public Education, (New York: MacMillan Co., 1966) p. 2.

4. M.H. Moscow and M. Liberman, Colletive Negotiations for Teachers, (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1966) p. 246.

5. F. Newman and D. Oliver, "Education and Community," (Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 37, #1, 1967) p. 83)

6. Charles Perrow, "An Analyses of Goals in Complex Organizations". American Sociological Review, Vol. 26, 1961, pp. 858-860.

7. New York Times, September 15, 1968, p. 15.

8. Time Magazine, September 20, 1968.

Table 1

Perceptions of Final Control Over Economic Issues

Decision	Environmental Community Groups		Internal System members of the Professional Teaching Staff	
1. Preparation of the Budget	is	Should Be	is	Should Be
Superintendent	16.4% [1]	5.5%	34.6%	31.4%
Administrators	.9	3.7	11.7	27.1
Teacher	--	.9	.5	10.6
School Board	70.9	46.8	52.2	30.3
Parents (Community)	11.8	43.1	1.0	.5
2. New Buildings and Facilities				
Superintendent	6.9%	4.0%	29.8%	27.5%
Administrators	2.9	1.0	12.2	15.2
Teacher	--	--	1.1	12.4
School Board	45.1	15.8	45.7	35.4
Parents (Community)	45.1	79.2	11.2	9.6
3. Faculty Salaries				
Superintendent	10.5%	2.4%	13.8%	8.1%
Administrators	1.2	1.2	4.8	7.4
Teacher	3.5	6.0	5.4	21.6
School Board	76.7	57.1	75.4	60.8
Parents (Community)	8.1	33.3	.6	2.0

[1] Note: totals may not add to 100% because of rounding errors

Table 2

Perceptions of Final Control Over Administrative Issues

Decision	Environmental Community Groups		Internal System members of the Professional Teaching Staff	
1. Hiring of Faculty	is	Should Be	is	Should Be
Superintendent	29.3%	20.5%	48.9%	31.7%
Administrators	16.4	26.8	43.0	60.1
Teachers	--	2.7	.9	4.2
School Board	54.3	48.2	7.2	4.2
Parents (Community)	--	1.8	--	--
2. Resolution of Problems with Administrative Services				
Superintendent	31.0%	16.7%	25.0%	23.7%
Administrators	25.3	38.9	67.4	67.6
Teachers	1.1	--	.7	4.3
School Board	41.4	42.2	6.3	4.3
Parents (Community)	1.1	2.2	--	--
3. Resolving Problems with Community Groups				
Superintendent	19.7%	9.6%	46.8%	41.7%
Administrators	7.9	4.8	13.5	13.0
Teachers	2.6	3.6	8.1	15.7
School Board	48.7	43.4	23.4	16.7
Parents (Community)	21.1	38.6	8.1	13.0

Table 3

Perceptions of Final Control Over Educational Issues

Decision	Environmental Community Groups		Internal System members of the Professional Teaching Staff	
	is	Should Be	is	Should Be
1. Choice of Textbook				
Superintendent	19.4%	10.2%	8.9%	3.6%
Administrators	23.5	22.4	64.2	31.4
Teachers	23.5	48.0	23.7	62.4
School Board	26.5	12.2	3.2	2.6
Parents (Community)	7.1	7.1	--	--
2. Resolution of Academic Problems				
Superintendent	9.3%	5.5%	6.7%	8.2%
Administrators	49.5	32.1	74.9	60.2
Teachers	26.2	30.3	10.6	23.4
School Board	.9	2.8	--	--
Parents (Community)	14.0	29.4	7.8	8.2
3. General Instructional Policy				
Superintendent	15,5%	14.4%	31.1%	20.6%
Administrators	28.6	25.6	51.5	36.9
Teachers	4.8	15.6	9.6	38.1
School Board	50.0	32.2	7.8	4.4
Parents (Community)	1.2	12.2	--	--
4. Introduction of New Instructional Methods				
Superintendent	25.8%	15.2%	17.7%	9.3%
Administrator	25.8	25.0	61.5	45.4
Teachers	7.5	23.9	15.6	43.7
School Board	34.4	18.5	5.2	1.6
Parents (Community)	6.5	17.4	--	--

Table 4

Chi Square Analysis of Differing Perceptions of Final Control

Decisions	Environmental Community Groups (is vs. should be)	Internal Systems Members (is vs. should be)	Environmental Group vs. internal system members (is)	(should be)
Preparation of the Budget	33.72[1]	42.94	41.46	133.41
New Building and Facilities	25.51	21.17	56.40	142.86
Faculty Salaries	20.38	22.77	13.24	54.63
Hiring of Faculty	10.22	20.76	95.77	97.46
Resolution of Problems of Administrative Services	7.73	5.26	53.98	57.14
Resolution of Problems of Community Groups	7.78	5.50	27.02	51.85
Choice of Textbooks	16.26	59.35	72.31	33.38
Resolution of Student Academic Problems	12.22	11.51	21.25	35.43
General Instructional Policy	16.10	37.24	61.07	63.80
Introduction of New Instructional Methods	19.54	38.06	69.80	70.65

[1]Note: Results reported are Chi Square values

$x^2_{.05} = 9.49$

$x^2_{.01} = 13.23$